

## **Cabinet Member Update**

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**Briefing of:** Councillor Tim Barnes, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

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### **1 CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): RESPONDING TO CHILDREN'S EVOLVING NEEDS**

1.1 This year has seen some unprecedented challenges to us as a country and this has implications on the way we deliver our services. We are working tirelessly to support our vulnerable children during these difficult circumstances. Since our last report for P&S Committee in mid-June, we have continued to work in innovative ways for our young people and families:

1.2 Work to support children returning to school this September is a priority:

- Attendance levels for eligible primary children reached 36% during July before the summer holidays compared to a national average for the same period of 28%.
- We are supporting all schools to have the required Public Health protective and response measures and plans, ahead of children returning to school in September.
- We have helped schools to access additional tutoring support and catch-up funding. This will help to assess starting points and address gaps in knowledge and skills.
- We are supporting schools to return to full on-site delivery and extra-curricular provision for all children, including those with SEN. The emphasis is on pupil well-being.
- We are supporting families and children with their attendance and return to school. We are communicating with and providing reassurance and support to our most anxious children and families, particularly those with an EHCP and children with existing attendance concerns. We have also launched the ['Back to School'](#) campaign.

- We are continuing to provide access to online education platforms and work packs as part of a broader blended learning approach.
- We continue to review and advise on schools' risk assessments as these are updated and shared.
- We have established a programme of professional development and support for school leaders to focus on relevant areas of leadership and curriculum in helping with the management of the current context.

1.3 There has been wider work to support parents, young people at risk and to monitor Covid19 outbreaks:

- Our Integrated Gangs and Exploitation Unit adapted its model throughout lockdown by engaging with young people with online employment coaching, and visiting young people known to them around Westminster during 'ride-outs'. Over 50 community members also recently participated in an online conversation to understand and address concerns about violence.
- We are coordinating with Public Health daily to monitor outbreaks in settings and provide support and guidance when necessary.
- Our parenting offer to families has continued to develop and is now delivered online. Many sessions are offered in the evening.
- We are also testing the introduction of some online parenting courses for parents to complete on their own at home with regular follow up from an Early Help Practitioner; this is with Triple P 0-12 or Teen Online and the Freedom on-line programme. The Building Relationships for Stronger Families sessions (funded by DWP) continue to be delivered by Tavistock Relationships and, like us, they are providing these programmes remotely.

## 2 RECOVERY

2.1 Since July, a work programme has been established to coordinate recovery activity across children's services. The main work areas include:

2.2 **Engaging teams on future delivery plans:** A series of initial online workshops with teams is underway. The objectives of these sessions are to provide structured time for teams to capture and reflect on the achievements since the Covid-19 outbreak, consider the challenges ahead, and to generate ideas for changes to service models to become even more resilient. A key theme emerging is that delivering services digitally can work very well in some circumstances, but it is a mixed picture and therefore a blended service model of digital and face to face is required. These are initial idea sessions and our priority for the next three months is to refine the ideas and develop tangible actions. Collaborating with children, young people, families and partners will be essential to the development of many of these actions. Another key part of the future delivery planning, due to start in September, is thematic enquiries into cross-cutting areas. This will include rapid improvement work into developing a resilient and confident workforce, strengthening our partnership working in systemic practice, progressing anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practices, and delivering services for greater value for money.

2.3 **Activity based costing and user insight:** We have gathered feedback on the impact of different delivery models during lockdown. For example, 41 in depth interviews were undertaken in May with families through the pre-birth to five system transformation programme. We asked families about their experiences of virtual service delivery during Covid-19, many of which were positive. Building on insights gained from our work with the Design Council last summer, we are using the findings to inform future service delivery. For instance, we are recommending introducing a choice of digital offers for Universal families at later stages of the programme. An approach to financial modelling across children's services has been developed and agreed. This activity-based costing will quantify the impact of technological changes to delivery models, which can then be translated into savings options for children's services to consider.

2.4 **Service plans for a return to office working:** Applying learning from lockdown and an understanding of covid-19 secure buildings, we are developing a coherent approach to how we work and where. Colleagues across teams are working together to develop our own directorate ambitions focused on community presence and agile use of space. We have begun asset mapping to understand what spaces might be available to us. Over the next month we are undertaking detailed planning work on a service by service basis, collaborating with colleagues to identify how staff can return to more office-based presence, where appropriate, and the steps that are needed to get there.

### 3 CITY FOR ALL PRIORITIES

3.1 We have recently framed a delivery plan for our City for All commitments. The plan outlines the benefits, measures and key milestones for our commitments. It will enable Member and ELT oversight of progress and delivery. In our delivery plan, our City for All Children's Services commitments for this year are:

- *Keep children at the centre of everything we do – they are our future.*
  - We will put children at the centre of everything we do- connecting services across the Council and our partner agencies to deliver the best services for our children, creating ambitious opportunities that allow all our children to achieve their potential.
- *Transform our Pre-Birth to Five Programme*
  - We will transform our pre-birth to five programme to ensure those children with the highest level of need have access to the best support in the early years.
- *Ensure all our children can access our excellent schools which celebrate the diversity of our communities and promote inclusion.*
- *Ensure our offer is effective in engaging young people in positive activities*
  - Ensure our offer is effective in engaging them in positive activities and supporting them to resist involvement in crime and offending.

- *Improve our local offer for children with special needs or disabilities*
  - Provide the very best support for our families who are caring for a child with a disability, facilitating services that they say matter to them and ensuring there is a choice.
- *Adopt a whole system approach to ensuring our communities stay healthy*
  - Ensure adults and children at every age can stay healthy by easily accessing everything our community has to offer through enhancing our partnership approach to education and healthcare with agencies, including voluntary sector organisations, physical activity, leisure and sport, libraries, GP surgeries and other care professionals.
- *Provide services that enhance emotional wellbeing and support mental health*
  - Strengthening emotional wellbeing and mental health support through a range of projects and seeking to extend offer 18-24.

#### 4 OPERATIONAL UPDATES

- 4.1 We have seen a **reduction of referrals** to social care by approximately 30%. We have launched a public awareness campaign to alert people to child protection concerns and how to report them.
- 4.2 **Community health services** have not been delivering a face to face offer in the usual way across universal services and health referrals were down by 33% in Q1 of 2020 compared to Q1 of 2019.
- 4.3 We are working with schools to understand and address **falling pupil admission** numbers in primary schools and ensure transparent/ consistent budget reporting. We have also launched a public awareness campaign, '[Back to School](#)', to get children back to school in September.
- 4.4 **Ofsted will conduct visits** to schools during the autumn term to build a national picture of how education is recovering. At school level, the visits will be based around a series of collaborative conversations between school leaders and Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) about the actions leaders are taking and any barriers that they are facing in returning pupils to a full education. There will be no graded judgements. A small number of pilot visits (15 across London) will be carried out during the week beginning 14th September to help Ofsted to ensure that inspectors focus on the right aspects of schools' work during the visits and will be vital in getting the methodology right.
- 4.5 There has been a high level of media interest in the **recent arrivals of refugees** crossing the channel. Despite a reduction of arrivals of unaccompanied minors arriving in Westminster during 'lockdown', we are now seeing high numbers of new arrivals. We have had 14 new young men in the last 4 weeks and are working closely with them to ensure their needs are met and they get the right support. This does understandably create a pressure on placement resources; however, we have been able to place these young men appropriately and

continue to work closely with the Home Office and partners to meet these demands.

- 4.6 Our three **Family Hubs continue to develop**, and all now have a Family Navigator. This is a role that was tested in the south and has recently been rolled out to the two new hubs in the NE and NW. The Family Navigator is linked to schools and GP practices in the local area, acting as a bridge to help these providers support families into the services needed as early as possible and then coordinating the network around the family.
- 4.7 The **Short Breaks Summer Holiday Programme** has been successful and heavily subscribed as a result of ensuring our capacity has not been affected. Usually during summer, we have 25 children and young people per day at our centres, however, we redeveloped this offer in response to the pandemic offering smaller sessions but across multiple sites (using youth clubs, schools, and children's centres some of which aren't currently operating). This meant each child or young person was able to attend 2 full days a week for each of the four weeks of August.
- 4.8 **A level results:** The latest data shows that:
- The new assessments have brought about a marked increase in the performance across all the grade boundaries for schools.
  - For all the schools this has resulted in their A level performance being above their 2019 in most of the grade boundaries.

We are still following up the gaps in the data and will be updating when we have this additional data.

- 4.9 **GCSE results:** We now have results for all schools. There are some gaps in some areas of the data but we are able to ascertain the provisional borough averages for pass grades in English and mathematics. Initial observations:
- For English and maths passes: grade 4-9 - the rate went up 8 percentage points to 83% and for 5-9 it went up 10 percentage points to 63%. These averages are again likely to be well above national averages and are very good.
  - Progress 8 and Attainment 8 performance measures: outcomes from the data shared so far is positive and for most schools scores increased, although there were dips in attainment 8 outcomes at King Solomon Academy and St Marylebone C of E Academy.

## 5 LIBRARIES

Following Government guidelines libraries reopened with social distancing measures in place. Face covering is mandatory for visitors and hand sanitisers and hygiene supplies are also provided. All libraries have a cleaner on site to clean PCs after each use. A security guard is also on site to help

staff encourage customers to observe social distancing. Paddington Children's library remains closed.

The Home Library Service which provides elderly and vulnerable residents who are unable to leave their home with reading materials continues to deliver services. The service was extended to include children who have little or no access to reading materials with books to encourage reading and maintain their reading levels.

A virtual library via social media channels continues with content including videos, learning resources, virtual book groups, reading recommendations, information about health and wellbeing and sessions for children. Customers can also access the e-resources which shows a positive increase in usage since since lockdown began with eBooks up 73%, eAudio up 62.1%, eMag up 57.1% and eNews up 93.8%.

## **6 REGISTRATION SERVICES**

A full birth registration service resumed on 1 July and to date 1872 births have been registered double the number from the same period in 2019. All parents of babies born during the lockdown period have been offered appointments. In addition parents of babies born outside Westminster but who reside in Westminster, have been offered opportunities to register the birth via declaration by Westminster Registrars.

Death registrations continue to be completed via telephone. Marriage and civil partnership ceremonies resumed on 4 July with numbers restricted to a maximum of 30 including the registrars to enable socially distancing and attendees are required to wear face masks. Over 200 ceremonies have been conducted to date, including at licensed venues in Westminster. The temporary cessation of ceremonies has resulted in high levels of enquiries from couples all over the country, who had planned their ceremony with Westminster. Significant resources have been dedicated to contacting everyone offering them support in finding suitable alternatives. Old Marylebone Town Hall has a large ceremony room with a capacity of 100, which is being used to allow the maximum number of socially distanced attendees of 30.

Private Citizenship ceremonies resumed on 27 June and following guidance on socially distanced ceremonies Group Citizenship ceremonies resumed on 19 August. Certificate services resumed on 24 August.